Contribution of British Governor–Generals to the Development of Archives and Architecture in Bangalore

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ABSTRACT:

This research paper explores the major contributions of British Governor–Generals in the development of archives and architecture in Bangalore during the colonial period. It traces the administrative and infrastructural initiatives taken by colonial authorities to systematize record–keeping, establish archival institutions, and design public buildings that reflected European architectural influences blended with Indian traditions. The study is based on historical sources, archival records, and secondary literature. It concludes that while British administrative reforms brought modernization and urban development, they also reinforced social hierarchies and left a complex legacy.

KEYWORDS:

Bangalore, colonial administration, Governor–General, archives, architecture, public buildings, urban planning, British legacy.

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Introduction:

Bangalore (now Bengaluru) evolved from a fortified town under local rulers into a major colonial and post–colonial metropolis. British rule, especially through the policies of Governor–Generals and Resident Commissioners, played a major role in transforming Bangalore's urban structure and administrative systems. The introduction of systematic record management, public works, and architectural planning during the British period provided the city with institutional and structural foundations that continued to influence it well into the twentieth century (Rice, 1897; Nair, 2005).

Governor–Generals such as Lord Wellesley, Lord Cornwallis, and Lord Dalhousie, although not directly resident in Bangalore, were responsible for broad administrative reforms across India that shaped governance structures in the Mysore region. These reforms included codification of laws, record preservation, land revenue reforms, and architectural planning for cantonments and administrative offices (Marshall, 2000).

The following sections examine the twin dimensions of colonial contribution – the development of archives and the influence on architecture – while reviewing the scholarly literature that has discussed these legacies.

Historical Background: Bangalore Before and During British Rule

Before the British period, Bangalore was an important provincial centre under the Vijayanagara Empire, followed by the rule of Kempegowda, Hyder Ali, and Tipu Sultan. The city's layout was characterized by fortifications, market streets, and religious structures that served the needs of local communities. The British East India Company gained control after Tipu Sultan's defeat in 1799, leading to new forms of urban management (Lewis, 2011).

Under British rule, Bangalore became both a military cantonment and a civil administrative centre. The cantonment, established in 1809, was governed directly by British authorities, while the "Pettah" or native town remained under the Mysore administration. This duality shaped the city's physical and administrative divisions (Rajyadhyaksha, 1995). The British introduced new forms of governance that required systematic documentation, leading to the establishment of record rooms, archives, and libraries.

Literature Review

The historiography of colonial Bangalore shows that the British impact on the city's institutions and architecture was profound but ambivalent. Several scholars have studied this transformation from different perspectives:

- **Colonial Administration and Archival Systems:** Burton Stein (1989) and David Washbrook (2004) note that British administrative reforms emphasized written documentation, classification, and rational record keeping. The establishment of the Indian Records Commission in the 1890s institutionalized archival practice across British India, influencing provincial archives like those in Bangalore.

- **Urban and Architectural Studies:** Janaki Nair (2005) and Narayani Gupta (1981) have explored how British urban planning in Bangalore reflected imperial aesthetics and functional needs. The cantonment architecture mirrored European designs adapted for Indian climates. The construction of public buildings, such as the Attara Kacheri (High Court) and St. Mark's Cathedral, demonstrates the colonial architectural ethos.

- **Cultural and Spatial Studies:** Thomas Metcalf (1989) in An Imperial Vision discusses how British architecture in India symbolized authority and civility, merging Gothic, classical, and Indo–Saracenic styles. In Bangalore, these stylistic expressions were evident in government offices, churches, and residences.

- **Archival Legacy:** Deepak Kumar (1991) and Indira Chowdhury (2007) highlight how

colonial archives shaped postcolonial historiography. The records collected during the colonial era now serve as valuable resources for understanding governance, land management, and cultural change in nineteenth–century Bangalore.

The literature shows that while British Governor–Generals may not have personally supervised every project in Bangalore, their administrative policies laid the foundation for systematic governance, which directly influenced the city's archival and architectural evolution.

Development of Archives in Bangalore

Early Record–Keeping Practices

The need for accurate and durable documentation led to the establishment of early record rooms within the offices of the Collector, Magistrate, and Military Cantonment. As early as 1820, official circulars emphasized the preservation of land revenue documents and correspondence (Rice, 1897). British record officers introduced filing systems, catalogues, and indexing methods. These practices helped create the first institutional memory of colonial Bangalore.

Institutionalization of Archives

By the late nineteenth century, archives became formalized institutions under the control of the provincial government. Governor–Generals' directives from Calcutta and Madras required every district to maintain proper record registers. The construction of government offices such as the Attara Kacheri (completed in 1868) included dedicated spaces for document storage and retrieval (Gupta, 1981). The building itself, with its red neoclassical design, became both an administrative and symbolic centre.

The Mysore Government Archives, established later, built on these colonial precedents, collecting papers from the British Residency and various departments. This institution remains a crucial resource for researchers even today.

Legacy of Archival Systems

Colonial archives created a model of bureaucratic record keeping that shaped the governance of independent India. However, these archives also reflected the asymmetry of power between rulers and subjects. The British prioritized fiscal, legal, and military records, while local community voices often went undocumented (Chowdhury, 2007). Despite this limitation, the existence of systematic archival systems helped preserve historical continuity and administrative accountability.

British Architectural Influence in Bangalore:
European Styles and Adaptation

British architectural intervention in Bangalore combined practicality with symbolism. Early public buildings followed neoclassical symmetry, while later constructions incorporated Indo–Saracenic elements. The colonial bungalow, with its wide verandas and high ceilings, became the hallmark of European residential architecture in the cantonment (Metcalf, 1989).

Prominent examples include:

*   **Attara Kacheri (High Court):** Built in 1868, it reflects classical European proportions with local red brick construction.
*   **St. Mark's Cathedral (1808–1812):** A Georgian–style church with large windows and domed interiors.
*   **Bangalore Palace (1878):** Modeled on Tudor Revival architecture, representing the cultural aspirations of the Mysore royals influenced by British taste.

Urban Planning and Public Infrastructure

The British designed Bangalore's cantonment with straight roads, parade grounds, clubs, and churches. The contrast between the ordered cantonment and the organic native town mirrored colonial social hierarchies. Governor–General Lord Dalhousie's public works policy and the establishment of the Public Works Department (PWD) in the 1850s expanded infrastructure across India, including Bangalore (Marshall, 2000).

Architectural Legacy

Today, many of these colonial structures are part of Bangalore's heritage zone. Their architectural value and historical significance continue to shape urban identity. Conservation challenges persist, but awareness of their legacy has grown through heritage policies and academic research.

Conclusion:

The contributions of British Governor–Generals to the development of archives and architecture in Bangalore were part of a broader colonial project of governance and control. Their reforms brought organization, durability, and administrative efficiency, introducing written documentation and systematic urban planning. Buildings such as the Attara Kacheri and churches in the cantonment are enduring symbols of this period.

However, this legacy is double–edged. The British archival and architectural systems often prioritized imperial interests over indigenous needs. While archives preserved valuable information, they also reflected

colonial biases in documentation. Similarly, architectural styles expressed power and order, not necessarily cultural inclusion.

After independence, these colonial institutions were repurposed and adapted. The archival systems provided the backbone for modern public record offices, and the buildings continued to serve administrative functions. Bangalore's current identity as an administrative and cultural hub owes much to these foundations, though its development since independence has reinterpreted their meanings.

The study of British Governor–Generals' contributions to Bangalore's archives and architecture reminds us that colonialism shaped both tangible and intangible heritage. It teaches that modernization and domination can coexist in complex ways. A critical engagement with this history helps preserve these legacies responsibly while recognizing their historical contexts.

References:

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